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## Converting waste to fuel good idea

**Our view: There are few downsides to moving ahead with a plan that would transform urban green waste to ethanol to help fill Southern California's fuel tanks.**

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Californians are fed up with high fuel prices, but some relief may finally be in sight. The ethanol industry is revving up to boost the supply of its renewable fuel in Southern California. And the technology has advanced to the point that there are really few downsides to moving forward.

The idea is to transform urban green waste headed for landfills into ethanol through a process that generates little pollution. Ethanol can be either blended with regular gasoline as a clean-fuel additive or used to create E85 gas for so-called flex-fueled cars. (E85 is 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent gasoline.)

Irvine-based BlueFire Ethanol has already received a permit to build a \$30 million ethanol plant near a landfill in Lancaster. Once the plant is operating next year, it will take in green municipal wastes, such as non-recyclable paper, grass clippings, wood chips, construction debris and straw, and process it into ethanol.

Arnold Klann, BlueFire's chief executive officer, said the plant would process a batch of urban green waste into ethanol in only 18 hours. For

each ton of waste that is fed into the plant, 70 gallons of ethanol is produced - at an operational cost of under \$1 a gallon. The plant won't be a strain on drought-plagued Southern California's water resources because it will use reclaimed water.

Klann hopes to build such plants in other locations in Southern California, possibly in the L. A. basin. Such plants would allow the state to be less dependent on the Midwest for ethanol imports. This would also reduce associated ethanol transportation costs, which in turn would reduce greenhouse gases. And the operation of ethanol plants would further reduce the production of these gases because less green debris would end up in landfills, which are major generators of methane gas.

There are other side benefits: The ethanol plants Klann advocates produce lignin, a fuel source for plant operations, and gypsum solids, which are important soil additives.

If the ethanol industry is right in its assessment, California could generate its own transportation fuel from municipal waste, reduce pollution and perhaps stop importing oil from unstable nations that are hostile to U.S. interests.

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